

*A World for Children, A World of Allusion:
An Analysis of the Allusions within A Series of Unfortunate Events*

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2015

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2015

Undergrad
Thesis
LD
2489
.Z4
2015
.973

Abstract

Children's literature is often a genre that is considered to be too simple or too juvenile for serious scholarly consideration. This genre, typically associated with teaching children basic morals or cultural values, is one that adults do not often venture to read. This does not mean that all of children's literature does not contain elements that make them appropriate for both children and adult readers. In this thesis, I examine Daniel Handler's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* and the way in which Handler utilizes allusions specifically in a way that mimics the very stage of childhood. Handler creates a series that is intended for a child audience but its clever use of the literary archive deems it also enjoyable by adult readers.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Joyce Huff for advising me through this project.

Her insight into various areas and aspects of literature became quite valuable for the completion of this project. Furthermore, her personal enjoyment of Handler's series has helped to keep my interest in this project through the end.

A World for Children, A World of Allusion:

An Analysis of the Allusions within *A Series of Unfortunate Events*

Introduction

Daniel Handler's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is a series that includes concepts that are not typically found in all children's books—one of the most obvious of these being the prolific inclusion of allusions. Dante Alighieri, Charles Baudelaire, and Edgar Allan Poe are but a few of the figures referenced by Handler's allusions. These references are not ones that are readily recognized by all adults, let alone the intended child audience. By having such allusions present within his work, Handler establishes a complexity within his series that not all children's authors can pull off; he not only provides cultural awareness for children but also a means for intellectual challenge for adults.

Those that pick up a children's book, such as Handler's, will find that great practices are being done through the medium of children's literature. The overarching cultural norms and narratives are being introduced to children through these books. It is seen that "children's literature is a medium through which adults seek to manage and mould children's cognitive, moral, and social development into responsible and ostensibly empowered adulthood" (Bullen 200). Whether this may be teaching history through books such as *Who was Anne Frank?* or telling of expected hygiene practices in *I Love Taking a Bath*, this genre provides a method for shaping the minds of young readers. This may perhaps be why adults tend to dismiss the genre; these books are teaching norms that an adult of which an adult would already be aware.

Certain books within children's literature contain elements within their plot that may seem too mature—too *adult*—for the intended audience to handle. This creates a connection

between both the adult and the child reader in that they can equally find aspects to enjoy within the story. In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, that element is the underlying horror of the comic punishments--the blowing up of one small girl, the trip to the garbage chute for another, for instance. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, that adult element is the implication of drug influence on the story. In what is currently children's literature's most noteworthy series, Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, that element that crosses the boundary between children and adults is Daniel Handler's prolific and clever use of allusion.

From the names of his three protagonists to the characters within the narrator's autobiography, Handler uses allusions in a way that is both prolific and all-engrossing. While the sheer number of such allusions may seem alarming, these work not to confuse or overwhelm the child reader but rather to expose the child to bigger cultural narratives. Previous children's books may have meant to teach basic manners or practices that adults intend for children to learn by the time they are of age; Handler's books mean to provide for a child's intellectual growth.

Julie Barton argues that "the difference between child and adult affects language and intertextuality within the [series] for the adult author has access to a wealth of knowledge to which the child does not" (326). Handler uses his knowledge to make children more aware of both the expansive world of texts but also of the intertextual nature of literature in itself. What sets Handler's masterpiece apart from other works for children is that he does not censor or filter what he wants children to be exposed to. There are a limited number of children's novels that deal with the issues that Handler puts forth: death, misery, misfortune, orphanhood--all aspects that detract from a possible happy ending. In his allusions, he does a similar practice. Names such as Poe, Nero, and Orwell--names that typically generate dark or negative connotations for the well-versed reader--are given to children to conceptualize within the context of the series. It

is true, then, that Handler's knowledge does have an effect on the series but it is a knowledge that is readily shared to provide a foundation for the child so that there is a potential for an equal knowledge base. Handler's allusions therefore work to shorten the power distance between the author and the child reader.

That is not to say that Handler's incorporation of such elements works to only engross a child reader; the clever discussions of such adult themes and knowledge within the series ropes in an adult audience, as well. These adults see the allusions in a manner that is reverse to that of the child. A well-read adult will take their knowledge of Baudelaire or Eliot and apply it to *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. The result is ultimately a peer relationship with the author through his books. Adults recognize the connections that Handler is attempting to make and can assert that their knowledge equals that of the author.

To children, Handler instead establishes himself as a mentor of sorts, a guide through this harsh, unfortunate world and into the realm of higher literary and cultural awareness. Children may not pick up immediately on the references being made in the allusions but that does not mean that they will never join in on the discussion. Rather, children that fully immerse themselves within Snicket's narrative will retroactively make connections to the series. Bruce Butt argues that

“there is a generation of media-wise young readers who are sophisticated enough to appreciate a multilayered and frequently ironic narrative and they will sooner or later hear the name ‘Esme,’ ‘Orwell,’ or ‘Kafka’ and remember them from *Unfortunate Events* and, who knows, perhaps even investigate further.” (286)

In this way, Handler acknowledges that children will not always be children and as the readers follow the three Baudelaire orphans from their childhood into their experienced maturity, he also takes the reader into the realm of adult literary discussion.

A Series of Unfortunate Events is an exemplar of children's literature because it does not underestimate the knowledge or learning capacity of children; rather, it encourages growth by the inclusion of all of these allusions. Children are indeed able to handle complex literature and Handler does not shy away from that fact. This idea is also expressed by Julie Cross in her discussion of children and Gothic humor (another element present in Handler's work):

[M]uch of the humor in some comic Gothic texts for younger readers also relies on a sophisticated understanding of irony, parody, genre convention, and 'higher' order cognitive forms of humour, such as the perception of, and ultimate enjoyment and even acceptance of, incongruity" (58)

By exposing children to these "higher" conventions within literature, whether it be allusions or humor, the child reader reaps the benefit of being challenged mentally in what is generally a pleasure read.

Because of Handler's intentional complexity that comes with his abundance of allusions, I argue that *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is one of the most beneficial series for children to read and for adults to give scholarly consideration. The very nature of an allusion mimics the progression from being a child into being an adult: allusions are expanding upon previous knowledge, allusions facilitate a personal journey, and allusions also mark a notable transition from what is old into what is new. Furthermore, Handler introduces children to the idea of intertextuality and the way in which literature refers and connects to other literature. In the following pages, each of these aspects will be examined by application of both communication

and literary concepts upon the series' allusions in order to show not only how allusions work at their basic level but also how allusions have an impact upon the minds of children.

Allusions as Expansive

At the simplest consideration of an allusion itself, there is an essential cultural sign that is at work. Since a sign is defined as being "anything that can stand for something else" (Griffin 355), it is only logical that an allusion be considered as such: an allusion not only stands for itself on its own but also stands for a cultural or literary reference. In the traditional sense, signs are visual representations but in the context of literature, signs can be names, concepts, or themes. It is worthwhile, therefore, to see the allusions present in Handler's work as being overall cultural signs.

Communication theorist Roland Barthes developed a Semiotics theory that can be usefully applied to allusions within literature or any other form of media. In his original theory, he first explains how signs are created: "a sign is the combination of its signifier and signified" (Griffin 356). In other words, when a visual or mental representation (signifier) is combined with a meaning or idea (signified), then the resulting immediate correlation between the two is a sign. Furthermore, Barthes sees signs as part of a system of denotative and connotative definitions (359). It is this aspect of his theory that makes it particularly useful for examining allusions.

In the first-order denotative system of his model, Barthes places the denotation. This would be the face-value character, place, or phrase in which an allusion appears. It would not include even the recognition of an allusion at this order, simply placing the name, for instance, of a character as the signifier and the characteristics that are associated with that character as the signified. The character therefore becomes a sign of his characteristics. In the second-order

connotative system, the allusion itself can be applied to that character. The context and characteristics of the work that is being alluded to then become the signified. The final sign that emerges out of this two-stage process is the allusion that encompasses both the new work and the work that is being referenced.

In the case of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, this can easily be done with the allusions that occur within the names of characters. For instance, a major allusion within the work comes from the name of the banker Mr. Poe and the referenced poet Edgar Allan Poe. When considering the banker Mr. Poe in relation to the poet from whom he is named, the reader will find that the allusion is perhaps the most suitable of all for the character. In the series' typical formulaic nature, Mr. Poe's important arrivals happen shortly before or after a major death has taken place. His very first appearance establishes him as a signal of misfortune: "I'm afraid I have some very bad news for you children" (*Bad* 7). In fact, Mr. Poe can be seen as a grim reaper of sorts, as wherever he appears death is sure to follow. That he is named after Edgar Allan Poe is especially appropriate, therefore, as Poe is notoriously known for his use of death in his works.

It is worthwhile to note that Poe, like the Baudelaire orphans, was orphaned at an early age. By 1811, not only had his father, David, abandoned the Poe family but his mother, Elizabeth, was dead of pneumonia (Irving par. 2). Poe acknowledges his lack of a motherly relationship in his poems. For instance, in his work "To My Mother", Poe only mentions his own mother in the midst of his praise for his mother-in-law: "My mother--my own mother, who died early, / Was but the mother of myself" (Poe 46). A connection to his dying mother is made with the character of Mr. Poe through his incessant coughing, a trait that the Baudelaire orphans quickly learn. "Mr. Poe always seemed to have a cold and [they] were accustomed to receiving

information from him between bouts of hacking and wheezing” (*Wide* 5). Because of the lasting cough, one main symptom of pneumonia, the allusion keeps the idea of dead parents at the forefront in the story. Mr. Poe becomes not only the bringer of bad news--he becomes the embodiment of dead parents himself.

Taking such an analysis into consideration when placing the allusion between Mr. Poe and Edgar Allan Poe into Barthes’ diagram, therefore, yields results such as this:

Signifier (Denotative) “Mr. Poe”	Signified (Denotative) banker coughing naive ignorant
Sign (Denotative), Signifier (Connotative) “Mr. Poe” is a sign of ignorance, incompetence, and general unhelpfulness.	Signified (Connotative) Edgar Allan Poe despair loss death
Sign (Connotative) “Mr. Poe” is a simultaneously a sign of unhelpful and idiotic qualities, as well as being a sign of sorrow and death.	

Using the name itself as a sign, “Mr. Poe” becomes the signifier in the denotative order. The traits that come to mind for the reader are the signified: banker, coughing, naive, and ignorant (these being just a few of the characteristics of Mr. Poe). The sign for the denotative order, the meaning initially associated with the words “Mr. Poe”, is that “Mr. Poe” is representative of

ignorance, incompetence, and in the lives of the Baudelaire orphans can be a sign of blatant unhelpfulness.

Taking the allusion into consideration within the connotative order adds the second dimension of meaning to the sign. “Mr. Poe” and its denotation are the signifier but the literary allusion becomes the signified. The terms associated with the signified are therefore what concepts the allusions brings to mind: Edgar Allan Poe, macabre, death, despair, loss, sorrow. The original denotative order plus this new connotative order become the multi-faceted sign that is the literary allusion: “Mr. Poe” comes to stand not only for the character and his traits but also for the influence of the Poe, the poet, and his works. It is this multi-faceted sign that the well-versed reader will conceptualize when reading *A Series of Unfortunate Events*.

Perhaps the most important aspect of connotations, according to semiotic theorists, is the fact that connotations change over time (Chandler 45). What a sign means to one generation may not be the same as the next generation--historical and cultural factors contribute to the interpretation of a sign. In fact, a denotation may not gain its connotation until a different point in time. It is this idea that can be vital to the presence of literary allusions in children’s literature. Children at first reading (or hearing) of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* may take away only the surface denotation of “Mr. Poe.” They see the character being represented in his name and recall only that he is a bumbling banker. However, after years of their personal history and culture shaping their understanding, an older child with exposure to bigger social narratives can shape their connotation of “Mr. Poe” to include the reference made by the allusion.

Barthes’ model of the denotative and connotative orders of a sign overall shows the process of assigning meaning to an allusion but it also shows how children can later recognize and assign meaning to allusions in literature. The initial denotative recognition by a child should

not be taken for granted--it is when the allusion is later applied by the grown child that the cultural knowledge has proven to be assimilated.

In the same manner that allusions of name expand upon the connotative definition of those names respectively, allusions also work to expand upon the world originally created in the referenced work. It may seem at first glance that an allusion only adds depth to the context of the work it is placed within; however, a depth is added to the original source, as well, by the allusion's placement in other works.

Jacque Derrida, in his 1995 work *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, posits the idea of expansion with any text. He uses the term "archive" to describe what occurs to a work in both the natural and legal sense--*commencement* and *commandment* according to the original Greek (1)--and in this way, the archive involves not only the literary work itself but the collection of social, historical, and literary elements that surround the work. Derrida points out this second aspect of archives: "the archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignment, that is, of gathering together (3). To see this in the light of literary allusions, this concept would see allusions as a way in which an archive is expanded upon. The original work and its context, its reach, are furthered by allusions as the new work reflects back to the original archive.

This is seen in *A Series of Unfortunate Events* with the allusion of name, Baudelaire. A basic examination of this allusion reveals several connections with the orphans. Baudelaire himself, first of all, was orphaned at an early age. He was born in Paris in 1821 to François Baudelaire and Caroline Archimbaut Dufays. When he was only six years old, his father died. His mother was soon remarried to "The General", Lieutenant Colonel Jacques Aupick, a man whom Baudelaire came to deeply despise. (Pichois 20). In this manner, he also parallels the three orphans in his negative feelings toward his stepfather figure. There is a parallel in the very

naming of the villains, as well: both “The General” and “Count Olaf”, the dreaded replacement father figures, are elevated as being far superior to their children not only as a parent but also by way of honorary title. In a general view of the allusion, it is evident that the name is quite appropriate for the protagonists; looking at the archive specifically, however, reveals an even larger influence of context at work.

Derrida was not the only scholar to point out the expansion of texts; Julia Kristeva discusses the idea of ambivalence, or the way in which history/society is placed into a text and the way in which that text is placed within history/society (68). This means that in order to fully grasp the entire meaning of a text, not only do the words on the page have to be taken in but the overall context and archive of the text, as well. Furthermore, Mikhail Bakhtin considers a text to be “an absorption to and a reply to another text” (69). These two concepts can therefore regard allusions not only as a way in which past historical and social issues can place themselves within a new text but also a way in which the new work has absorbed and replied to the referenced work.

This type of response and connection can be seen in the allusion made to Baudelaire and his most famous work, *Le Fleurs du Mal*. This collection caused quite a scandal with its publication due to the nature of the work: death, sins, horror, and seduction are the foundation in these poems, the basis for which beauty has to be uncovered. The book was seen as a “clear outrage to ‘public morality’” (225). The Baudelaire allusion therefore expands upon the original work not only by mention of the Baudelaire name but also by the revelation about the nature of the audience. Daniel Handler’s series contains elements that some parents find inappropriate for a child audience: death, threats, violence, and abuse. In the same manner as *Le Fleurs du Mal* found audience outrage, so has *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. In addition to this connection, it

can be clearly seen how Daniel Handler has not only taken in the Baudelaire source material but has responded to its themes within his creation. For instance, Charles Baudelaire expresses in his poems a want for an ideal place that is not found in the material world around him but rather in a world that he shapes in his own thoughts. In “Landscape”, he writes:

“Riot, storming vainly at my window,
Will not make me raise my head from my desk,
For I shall be plunged in the voluptuousness
Of evoking the Springtime with my will alone,
Of drawing forth a sun from my heart, and making
Of my burning thoughts a warm atmosphere.”

This want from the narrator of a place that is indicative of spring and all of its warm goodness shows a want for a place that is essentially happy and therefore far away from the truth outside of the poet’s own mind. This is quite similar to thoughts expressed by the narrator Lemony Snicket in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. From the first book *The Bad Beginning* all the way until *The End*, Snicket pleads with the reader to find a different story to read. He states in the very beginning of his work that the story will not end well and reader may be well off reading something else (*Bad* 1). Snicket has knowledge of the unpleasant tale about to unfold and encourages the reader to retreat into the pleasant mental experience of a book with a happy ending. Snicket also tells of events that he would rather have happened, in an attempt to express the positive outcome that he has imagined within his head. “The Baudelaires were sitting on their suitcases,” he writes in *The Wide Window*. “Hoping that their lives were about to get a little bit better, and I wish I could tell you, here at the end of the story, that it was so” (*Wide* 210). Overall, the way in which Lemony Snicket mirrors the thoughts of the narrator in the poems of

Le Fleurs du Mal shows the manner in which Daniel Handler has not only absorbed Baudelaire and his works but has also crafted his own response to such works, making it appropriate for him to have named his protagonists after the poet.

The notion that literary worlds and their archives are expanding places an interesting outlook on the area of children's literature. Because the learning of cultural, social, and historical texts is a gradual process, children will not understand the entirety of a book's archive at the initial reading. Rather, knowledge and understanding has to come after significant time and growth has been achieved after the initial reading. That is not to say that books heavy with archontic connotations should be kept from children; rather, it implies that these books work more as an introduction into the larger narratives at play.

Overall, allusions within children's literature do much to add a depth, an expansion, to the text itself; specifically, allusions that are used as names do a power that is counter to their relative size. To use an allusion as a name is to succinctly place the context and influence of that older work upon a new character, using only a few words to put such a large idea into place. This is seen through the utilization of Barthes' semiotics theory to allusions as the visualization of the name itself brings forth a dual representation of both the character's traits and the traits of the referenced work. This is also seen in the way in which literature becomes archontic and collects together the contexts and subsequent works in which it is concerned. What is most important to see about expansion, however, is that it allows for cultural growth and recognition in children as they grow and become increasingly aware of the works that contribute to the archive and connotation of their beloved childhood stories.

Allusions as Conducive to Journeys

Stories that revolve around the physical journey of a protagonist have been told for centuries--the earliest classics such as *The Aeneid* or *The Odyssey*, for instance, tell of the enduring travels of their heroes. In many ways, Lemony Snicket has taken on the role of Virgil or Homer as he narrates the journey of the Baudelaire orphans. Although these examples include the influence of powerful gods and goddesses, story elements that seem fantastical to a modern audience, the original intended audience would have found these elements to fit into their cultural beliefs and values. Lemony Snicket's tale, when seen at face value, does not necessarily prove to be reasonable to a modern audience; rather, it is only when the influence of the literary allusions is taken into consideration that the story takes on a level of both coherence and fidelity.

Children that read *A Series of Unfortunate Events* are engrossing themselves in a world in which children are forced to grow up and face the harsh truths of life in a rather dramatic manner. From this story, many complicated concepts are discussed by the characters, such as the duality of good and evil in a person and the unfortunate circumstances that can be caused by sheer luck. These ideas on their own can be difficult for a child to grasp--but by placing them within a narrative such as this one, Daniel Handler has made the best evidence for such truths to be true.

Walter Fisher developed a theory on narratives and how they lead to knowledge; he calls it looking through a narrative paradigm. In his work, he explains that there are two paradigms with which people can view the world through a narrative: a rational world paradigm and the narrative paradigm (Rowland 264). The rational world paradigm includes the ideas that "human beings are essentially rational beings" and that "the world is a set of logical puzzles that can be solved through appropriate analysis and application of reason conceived as an argumentative

construct” (Fisher 59). To many, this is the ideal way to see the world: actions can be guided by reason and knowledge can be gained by logic.

An important allusion to consider is that of the Nevermore Tree. In book seven, *The Vile Village*, the Baudelaires encounter the Nevermore Tree in the area near the house in which they reside with their guardian, Hector. The name undoubtedly stems from Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “The Raven”, which features a narrator being tormented of the loss of his beloved Lenore by a raven. The superficial connection to be made between the two works through this allusion is that both dominant use birds to convey messages. In the case of Poe’s original work, the narrator asks the raven questions of his lost Lenore to which the raven always responds with “Nevermore” (line 48). The Baudelaires receive messages by way of the crows that roost in the Nevermore Tree each evening. These messages are revealed to be from the Quagmire triplets, their own lost ones (*Vile* 71).

What this allusions helps to imply in this book is an overall feeling of hopelessness. Poe’s narrator is bereft with the death of his beloved and experiences this sensation as the raven visits. He describes himself as having “vainly...sought to borrow / From [his] books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore” (lines 9-10). His sorrow is so great that even a retreat into books cannot ease his pain; his sorrow manifests himself as the raven first taps at his door. The narrator’s first instinct is that it is his Lenore come back to him, his mind so helplessly deep in thoughts of woe that his brain jumps to that first conclusion. The Baudelaires experience a helplessness of their own within *The Vile Village* as they receive these messages from the Quagmires. After having found and then lost their closest friends, the orphans expressed an intense worry over their well-being.

“[T]he three siblings were very worried about the Quagmires, and...every night when they tried to go to sleep, their heads were filled with terrible images of what could be happening to their friends, who were practically the only happy thing in the Baudelaires’ lives since they received the news of the fire that killed their parents and began the series of unfortunate events that seemed to follow them wherever they went.” (*Vile* 8)

Yet until they could find and rescue their friends, the Baudelaires were helpless in their situation. This was only furthered by the delivery of the couplets via the Nevermore Tree’s crows. To have proof of their friend’s survival inspired the Baudelaires to attempt to locate their friends in order to dissuade their sense of helplessness. Regardless, by the end of the volume, the fact that the Quagmires have escaped with Hector in his hot-air balloon does little to appease the Baudelaire’s feeling of powerlessness in reuniting with their friends, a sentiment that Poe’s narrator mirrors in his thoughts of being with Lenore again. This feeling does not leave the Baudelaires as they continue with their journey but rather intensifies as time passes with little sight of their lost friends.

If one were to view Lemony Snicket’s telling of the Baudelaire’s adventure through the rational world paradigm, however, it would be found that the story does not hold up its claims in a logical manner. Considering the Nevermore Tree allusion, for example, would find a situation that is just too ridiculous to believe. The massive collectiveness of the town of V.F.D., the hundreds of crows that are purported to roost in the Nevermore Tree, the idea that notes could be so easily transported by said crows, and the suspicion that the birds could carry the weight of the Quagmires are all ideas that reasonably could not hold up for a logical reader. This overall ridiculousness would deter from the main idea of this tree, the determination and perceived helplessness of the Baudelaires in finding Isadora and Duncan Quagmire.

Because of the presence of allusions, however, Fisher's narrative paradigm theory is best applied to *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. One of the prevalent qualities of an adequate narrative, according to the narrative paradigm, is its interaction with other texts. There is a complicated relationship between such texts as they have to "commend themselves to the reader by virtue of how well they measure up to...the stories the reader knows that are relevant to the story that they are reading" in order to become "the story by which new ones will be interpreted and assessed" (171). This means that not only does a good narrative take awareness of the texts that are of influence to its own creation but it also becomes a new text from which other narratives may develop. As allusions directly deal with the influence of texts upon each other, it only makes sense to apply it to Handler's work.

After an allusion is recognized and employed, Lemony Snicket's narration gains the coherence that it lacks in a rational sense. This coherence is described as being whether one can compare the narrative against "the authenticity and nature of a person's own *unique* narrative" (Hanan 5). Coherence is essentially a mental measure of how probable the story would be in one's own life. At its superficial level, the Baudelaires' experience with the Nevermore Tree is not very probable to its reader. A young child would most likely never have to experience the passing of messages through crows in a large tree and they certainly would not have had to deal with the kidnapping of their best friends. The story itself lacks coherence, becoming a scene that may be enjoyed for its entertainment value by children but not necessarily for its real-world applications.

Looking at the connection between the Nevermore Tree and "The Raven", however, brings forward the idea of losing a person that is dear and the devastating emotions that come with such departure. To the child reading the series, that loss would most likely be through a

different means that kidnapping--perhaps their best friend has moved away or has been put in a different classroom in school. The young reader can relate to the sense of bereavement felt by the Baudelaires, especially as the Baudelaires find couplets at the base of the tree, reminders of both how close and how far away are their friends. The coherence comes out of the shared emotional turmoil for children at that age.

Fidelity is the other quality that is ascertained as being vital for a narrative to be seen as a good piece of evidence for knowledge. This quality has much to do with the "soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values" (Fisher 349-350). In this way, narrative fidelity is derived from the culture in which it was produced and subsequently interpreted. It has to match not only the rationalizations of the culture at large but also the values in which the culture places importance. The Nevermore Tree also gains this quality by seeing it in connection with its allusion. It would seem rather irrational to use crows as a way to send and receive messages (not to mention, the supposed verbal interruptions from a raven); yet, a modern audience's cultural and historical knowledge would reflect that birds have indeed been used to pass along messages in the past, proving it to be true. Additionally, the value of friendship and its importance is something that is also in regard in current culture, redeeming the actions of the Baudelaires in their willingness to do anything possible to get their friends back, even climbing the monstrosity that is the Nevermore Tree. Violet remarks: "There's only one thing to do...We'll have to go up and look for them" (*Vile* 79). Hector, the adult, is the one to bring them to reason, not for the sake of rescuing their friends but for the practical matter of climbing the tree. This value of appreciated friendship that resonates with the reader proves the narrative of Lemony Snicket to have fidelity and thus be considered as a good transmitter of knowledge.

That knowledge that is being transmitted to the young reader is that of the journey it takes to grow up. There are many facets of growing up that Snicket addresses in his narrative: the physical changes, the psychological development, the cognitive growth, and even the moral fluctuations. For instance, in the last book of the series, *The End*, Snicket describes how the Baudelaires have shifted their morals because of their unfortunate journey.

“When the Baudelaires first encountered Count Olaf, their moral compasses never would have told them to get rid of this terrible man, whether by pushing him out of his mysterious tower room or running him over with his long, black automobile. But now, standing on the *Carmelita*, the Baudelaire orphans were not sure what they would do with this villain who was leaning so far over the boat that one small push would have sent him to his watery grave.” (*End* 18-19)

Such moral tribulations are not the worries of typical children but rather of adults. This is not a moral as simplistic and whole-hearted as the ones handed to children from fables and nursery rhymes; this is a complex personal issue to be contemplated by even the adult reader. Is it okay to punish or harm an individual that is known to commit horrible acts? Is it acceptable to take justice into one's own hands when higher authority figures are of no use? These questions are ones not easily answered and are ones that even the know-all Lemony Snicket cannot answer for the children. This is but one example of the way in which Snicket shows how the youngsters have developed across the span of thirteen books, showing how their childish innocence has transitioned into an acknowledgement of mature issues.

It is because of the literary allusions and their connections with *A Series of Unfortunate Events* that Lemony Snicket can be proved to be a knowledgeable narrator. The journey of the Baudelaire orphans holds more truth for the reader because of the coherence and fidelity that is

provided by such allusions. The allusions present in the place names therefore help to guide the reader to knowledge.

The great stories handed down in the oral tradition did not just utilize the journey of the main character; they also utilized repetition throughout that journey. *The Odyssey*, for instance, sees Odysseus make way from island to island, encountering gods and goddesses, and losing some of his men upon each new destination. The use of repetition in such stories passed down mostly by oral tradition serves to assist in the act of storytelling itself. To the one reciting this long epic, to have a formula set forth to follow allows for less opportunity to forget the details of the tale. It is interesting, therefore, that Daniel Handler allows for Lemony Snicket to use a lot of repetition within *A Series of Unfortunate Events* as this particular story is being written down and not spoken. However, the tendency for children to enjoy repetitive actions allows not only for the intended audience to keep reading the thirteen-volume series but also to catch any slight variations in the pattern--namely the presence of literary allusions.

The journey that the Baudelaires take follows a formulaic pattern throughout a majority of the series: The orphans begin at the residence of a new guardian or arrive at a new unfamiliar place. The children start to see how they could live out their lives at this new place but then Count Olaf shows up (mostly in disguise). Attempts are made to thwart Count Olaf and his plan but regardless, someone is almost guaranteed to be murdered. Each book ends with the Count Olaf getting away and the children having to flee to their next location. Lemony Snicket even expresses at points in his narration about how the same events tend to happen to the three children. In *The Penultimate Peril*, he writes that

““Each mystery the Baudelaires discovered only revealed another mystery, and another, and another, and several more, and another, as if the three siblings were diving deeper and deeper into a pond, and all the while the city lay calm on the surface, unaware of all the unfortunate events in the orphans' lives.” (*Penultimate* 4)

This particular statement shows not only how repetitive the children's physical journey became but their mental journey saw the same patterns, as well. Not only were the children witnessing similar events but they were surrounded by new questions at each location. In the last book of the series, Snicket writes that not only will the conclusion be “like its bad beginning” but each “misfortune [has] only reveal[ed] another, and another, and another” (*End* 2). For a more adult audience, this type of repetition may be off-putting. However, when considering that the intended audience is actually children, this repetition throughout the series is quite appropriate.

From an early point in their development, children express a love for repetition. They beg for favorite stories to be read over and over to them. They want to watch the same silly cartoon again and again. And although these behaviors can be annoying for the parents that care for them, they actually prove to be cognitively beneficial to the child. Not only do these repetitions increase familiarity for the child, the child will also learn to ask more complex questions about the content and will develop a more sophisticated understanding of the material, particularly when it comes to rereading books (Yaden 557). This aspect is particularly crucial when understanding *A Series of Unfortunate Events* as the content becomes darker and more sophisticated as the books progress; what began as a tale of orphaned children becomes a lesson in good and evil, right and wrong. The repetition found in Lemony Snicket's narrative, therefore, helps to guide children into being able to handle such complex ideas.

The names of the places to which the Baudelaires travel are a primary marker that the repetition is going to continue--when an allusion is placed within a place name, though, it is cause for the reader to pause as the pattern has slightly been disrupted. In the case of book five, *The Austere Academy*, the Prufrock reference marks the first time in which an allusion is outright used as the new residence for the Baudelaires. Interestingly, repetition also appears in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." "In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo" (lines 13-14) is perhaps the most obvious case of repetition found in the poem as it occurs twice in exact form. This repetition, though emphasizing the sophistication that Prufrock has not obtained, shows movement--the women "come and go." Prufrock repeats another phrase that emphasizes movement, as well: "let us go" (line 1), which not only encourages movement but implies that the narrator will be the guide for this journey. Seeing the allusion in this way makes the connection between Eliot and Snicket that shows both using repetition to steer their readers in their intended direction. And in the case of *The Austere Academy*, Snicket has chosen to steer his readers in the direction of J. Alfred Prufrock.

It should be noticed that Eliot uses repetition in another way within his work--to show the adult feeling that life is monotonous. Namely, he uses the phrase "there will be time" (line 23) to catalog a list of practices that represent this sense of tire with daily living routines: preparing "a face to meet the faces that you meet" (line 27), and wondering "Do I dare?" interrupt the expected routine (line 37-38). This shows a drastic change from the repetition experienced by children. Children, as mentioned earlier, find fascination in routine and repetition brings to them an entertainment that strengthens their minds and overall development. However, as seen here in Prufrock's narration, adults find repetition to be monotonous and tedious in general. This may perhaps rationalize the later books in *A Series of Unfortunate Events* as Snicket slightly breaks

away from the formula established in earlier books as the Baudelaires' journey into locations that are not typical homes for orphaned children; as his original audience has grown with each new volume, these slight variations would work to keep the young child engrossed in repetition but also keep the growing child from growing bored with the narrative.

Repetition works in different ways within different works of literature. When seeing the literary allusions in the place names of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, the types of repetition seen in both works considered are related within the newer text. In Lemony Snicket's narrative specifically, the repetitions help to keep the young reader engrossed in the Baudelaires' journey. Tossing literary allusions into these repetitions causes a disruption in that pattern and therefore adds additional emphasis on the allusion itself and its influence.

Repetition is not the only important element to be inspected within the Prufrock reference. When making the connection for this allusion, there is a notable similarity to be seen in the ways in which both Lemony Snicket and J. Alfred Prufrock invite their readers to go with them on an especially dark journey. The first few lines of the poem set the scene for a rather dismal walk with Prufrock: "Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table" (1-3). The juxtaposition between the beauty of the second line (the evening sky) and the abrupt horror of the third line (the etherized patient) set the mood for the entirety of the "Love Song." Images of beauty and sophistication ("In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo" (13-14)) mingle with images of grim humanity ("I have gone at dusk through narrow streets / And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes / Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? (70-72)) to create a narrated journey that emphasizes despair through its blunt contrasts.

Similarly, Lemony Snicket creates such a journey for his own readers. Through his attempts to sway the readers from continuing to read the series, Snicket actually encourages the reader to continue to read, yet it is under the promise of a devastating story to come. He begins each book with a letter to the reader in which he describes the atrocity of the story to follow. The tale does in fact hold true to his warnings and the reader is faced with scenes as horrific as those related in “Prufrock”: children being kidnapped and threatened, innocent people being murdered, and innumerable cases of arson. But--like Prufrock--Snicket also cuts to scenes that are on more of a positive note, such as a conversation with Phil in *The Miserable Mill* in which the three Baudelaire children realize how lucky they have been throughout their misfortunes (193). Yet the circumstances for the three orphans always revert back to some level of despair and, like in Eliot’s poem, that back-and-forth contrast between the two makes the series all the more unfortunate.

Although the connection between Eliot and Handler can be overwhelmingly applied to the series as a whole, the fact that this particular allusion is applied to the school should not be overlooked. The characters and the events that occur at Prufrock Preparatory School indeed reflect the mood and darkness of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” The mere appearance of the school mirrors the sinister streets in the poem and Prufrock’s reminders of impending death:

“[I]t was not the buildings or the arch that made the children gasp. It was how the buildings were shaped— rectangular, but with a rounded top. A rectangle with a rounded top is a strange shape, and the orphans could only think of one thing with that shape. To the Baudelaires each building looked exactly like a gravestone.” (*Austere* 11)

Handler also gave an appropriate title to this volume in the series, *The Austere Academy*.

“Austere” is a word that not only means “stern” but also “grave” and “somber” (“austere”). This descriptor certainly applies to both Eliot’s and Handler’s masterpieces.

It is also of note to point out that “Prufrock” as an allusion does not appear on its own; rather, the school is “Prufrock Preparatory”, a name that implies a sense of getting ready, of anticipating for Prufrock. When considering this particular book in the midst of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* as a whole, there is a definite shift in tone that happens *after* this book ends. In many ways, the adventure that the Baudelaires go on becomes more hurried, more stressful, because of the events of *The Austere Academy*, namely the acquisition and subsequent loss of their friends, two of the Quagmire triplets. The later books become more gloomy and dark, essentially more Prufrock-esque, as the story progresses. The fifth volume does well to prepare for the devastation of the progressing story.

As a narrator, Lemony Snicket sets up a story in which children can easily follow the path of the protagonists as the tale progresses. This is primarily fueled by the places that the Baudelaires reside at each stage of their journey; within these places specifically, Snicket sets up a formulaic pattern for the unfortunate events to unfold. The allusions within the place names, therefore, work to mimic the natural pattern of daily life in the real world: life involves many patterns and routines but breaks in that routine--such as allusions--call for special attention.

Bringing the Past into the Present

Besides the allusions present in the names of the main characters, most of the allusions that Handler uses within his work are featured only briefly. Some appear for just a single sentence (“[N]ever, under any circumstances, let the Virginian wolfsnake near a typewriter” (*Reptile* 35-36) and some may last for an entire book (Dr. Orwell in *The Miserable Mill*). Because of the brevity of most allusions, when a reader encounters one that is sustained throughout the series, that allusion should be given particular attention.

In *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, the allusion that extends throughout all of the books--and even into the books that exist outside of the main series, such as *The Beatrice Letters* and *The Unauthorized Autobiography*--is that of Dante Alighieri and his beloved Beatrice. Because Dante and Beatrice were both real, historical figures, the utilization of this allusion adds more coherence to the work as a whole since Handler blurs real and fictional figures in the same manner as Dante does within *The Divine Comedy*. The adult reader may be able to see a similar story playing out in his or her own life as they recall their own experiences with the regret of a lost love. By incorporating this allusion in such a grand way, therefore, Handler contributes to the narrative coherence in a children’s work that could otherwise be dismissed for its fantastical elements.

Such an element present in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, is the way in which the reader meets quite a number of unique individual characters. There is one character, however, that the reader becomes somewhat familiar with but never truly meets: that of the elusive Beatrice. What begins as simply a woman of many dedications is revealed to be the deceased mother of the three children. These roles take second place to her most distinguished place in the series, though--as

the long lost love of the narrator. Seeing this through the context of Burke and Dramatism shows the underlying guilt of Lemony Snicket.

The relationship between Lemony Snicket and Beatrice Baudelaire can be connected to the allusion in a way that is quite obvious if the reader focuses on the name of the female and her untimely young demise. This scenario mirrors that of the fate of Beatrice Portinari, the renowned Beatrice that captured Dante Alighieri's attention and becomes a focus in his *Divine Comedy*. That Lemony Snicket should have a Beatrice of his own is quite appropriate for *A Series of Unfortunate Events* as the very nature of the plot mirrors that of Dante's *Inferno*. Snicket follows the Baudelaire orphans as they travel deeper and deeper into what becomes their personal hell in a journey that mostly mirrors that of Dante in his narrative.

Our first encounter with the Beatrice in Snicket's narrative is through his dedications; in fact, besides a few aside explanations throughout the text, these remain the primary source of information about the mysterious character. The first dedication in *The Bad Beginning* does not even make it clear that this dedication is to a fictional character; one may have ascribed it to someone in Daniel Handler's life. It is simple in nature and may be easily overlooked in the same way that the character is often overlooked: "To Beatrice--darling, dearest, dead" (*Bad* "To Beatrice"). The dedications remain brief as the books progress but still work to tell of the story between the two adults. *The Grim Grotto*, for instance, tells of the author's continued despair over Beatrice's death in but two lines. "For Beatrice--Dead women tell no tales. Sad men write them down" (*Grim* "For Beatrice"). These dedications keep Beatrice in the mind of the reader as they progress through the books, disallowing them from forgetting her influence on the author.

Lemony Snicket's role as a Dante-esque figure is a suitable connection, as well. Firstly, both men were involved in the engrossing disputes in their respective communities. For Dante,

this was the dispute between the Guelphs and Ghibellines--a dispute that would influence much of his writing (Quinones 15). Snicket's entanglement involves his role in the schism that separated V.F.D. and his telling of the Baudelaire's tale often involves his commentary on the event. Schisms, as he describes, involve "every person suggesting something different, every story like a layer of an onion, and every unfortunate event like a chapter in an enormous book" (*End* 248). The authors place their works within the context of their group struggles at the time.

A second connection can be made between the two in that both authors take their readers through a progression of sin, misfortune, and evil (a Hell of sorts). Dante's trip through Hell is the one that a cultured reader would be quick to remember. Guided by Virgil, Dante descends through the nine circles of Hell in *Inferno*, meeting not only popular public figures from his time but also pulling upon the classical influences of mythology, rhetoric, and the Bible. Within Canto IV, for instance, Virgil points out to the narrating Dante:

"Him with that falchion in his hand behold,
 Who comes before the three, even as their lord.
 That one is Homer, Poet sovereign;
 He who comes next is Horace, the satirist;
 The third is Ovid, and the last is Lucan.
 Because to each of these with me applies
 The name that solitary voice proclaimed
 They do me honour, and in that do well." (*Inferno* Canto CIV)

Dante takes note of these characters throughout his journey, and Snicket does the same within his narrative. Not only does Snicket give great detail about the secondary figures that appear within each book but the fact that he uses literary allusions also creates a connection with Dante. The

main difference between the two is that Dante used his journey and allusions to strike a political chord with his intended audience while Snicket uses the Baudelaire's path and allusions to add a more sophisticated layer to his narrative. Handler himself strikes a political chord, additionally, by not censoring the harsh world of his creation from the child reader; this allows children to be exposed to more mature themes and be allowed to interpret them through Snicket's narrative guidance.

Allusions, no matter how they are utilized by a particular author, work to do something quite important: they remind the reader of how the past is constantly of influence. Furthermore, by contrasting the past with the present in this simultaneous representation, it is quite easy to follow the transition that happens from the old culture and its ways into that of the new. Applying Dramatism and its implication to the narrative shows an additional way in which the past influences the present.

If there is any one emotion that could accurately describe Lemony Snicket in his narration it is that he feels guilty. As he chronicles the events surrounding the Baudelaires, he often laments that he could not play a more active role in their adventures. His greatest sense of guilt, however, seems to stem from his relationship with Beatrice. One of his telling dedications reads "Our love broke my heart, and stopped yours" (*Carnivorous* "For Beatrice"). We know from his narration that his role in the sugar bowl fiasco also left him feeling guilty over Beatrice's fate.

"When I am cold and duck into a teashop where the owner is expecting me, I have only to reach for the sugar bowl before my grief returns, and I find myself crying so loudly that other customers ask me if I could possibly lower my sobs." (*Carnivorous* 114)

That he should feel so guilty during his narration is quite appropriate when considering the details of Kenneth Burke's Dramatism theory.

The main idea behind Dramatism is that all rhetoric is an attempt to purge guilt. According to this theory, guilt and its subsequent redemption are needed as a way to resolve the "effects of acceptance and rejection of a hierarchy" (Samra 1). When someone decides that they have turned against or rejected a certain aspect of the prevailing order, the guilt can be purged through what Burke terms "mortification" or "victimage". After such purging takes place, the resulting redemption puts back in place the ideal order (Griffin 316-317).

By taking Burke's guilt-redemption cycle and applying it to Handler's narrator Lemony Snicket, it is possible to posit that the underlying reason that Snicket decided to write out the journey of the Baudelaire children was not necessarily to detail the lives of the three orphans but rather to conduct a purge of his guilt. To Snicket, the ideal order would be a world in which both he and Beatrice would coexist. Since he rejected that order by his role in her death, he felt an immense guilt and chose to mortify himself. By doing so, he places the blame directly on himself for that guilt. His narrative is his chance at redemption. It is unfortunate, however, that the conclusion of the series does little to restore the ideal order in Snicket's world. He admits in *The End* that as he concludes his investigation he still "visit[s] certain graves" (*End* 324). His story at face-value is an investigation of Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire but his underlying motive may be from guilt over Beatrice Baudelaire. Considering *The Unauthorized Autobiography* and *The Beatrice Letters* in this context hints that this guilt may perhaps never be purged and must therefore continue on in the supplemental books.

It is this connection that can be related back to the allusion of Dante and Beatrice. Dante, the author, held on to his adoration for Beatrice and in writing his epic as the narrator Dante, he

is expressing a guilt. In *Purgatorio*, the narrator reveals to Beatrice that he is guilty of trying to find happiness with her deceased memory and not in the living world. Dante confesses that “[t]he things that were at [his] hand, / With their false pleasure, turned [his] steps aside / As soon as [her] face had gone from sight” (*Purgatory CantoXXXI*). If this holds true for the author Dante, then the text of *The Divine Comedy* could be considered an expression of guilt over holding on to the memory of Beatrice in real life.

While this is so for Dante, the guilt-redemption cycle can also be applied to the author of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, Daniel Handler, namely by his prolific use of cultural allusions. Contemporary authors do utilize allusions in their works--however, Handler sets himself apart by the sheer quantity of allusions that he includes. In an ideal cultured world, the ideal hierarchy, the larger social narratives would be something to be treasured and their impact on modern works would be immense. However, not all members of the population find pleasure or respect for the older works. Handler, by including allusions, is essentially redeeming children’s literature especially from the guilt of forgoing the classics. By this redemption, children are more aware of the older narratives and can therefore grow to help develop a more culturally aware society--the ideal order.

In addition to seeing allusions as being a way in which the past influences the present via the guilt redemption cycle, there is another way in which this type of influence happens: the descent into Hell and back. This is one feature that seems to define a notable protagonist in ancient mythology and classical literature. This Hell can be a literal interpretation of the otherworldly place, such as when Hercules descends into the Underworld and brings back Theseus to the living world. But this Hell can also be a personal place of tribulation, a subjective Hell, such as when Jane Eyre flees from Thornfield Hall and must learn to survive without any

familiars or resources. No matter what form this descent takes, the katabasis—or descent--undertaken by the protagonist pushes them to their limits and causes them to mature as a person and therefore better themselves in the eyes of the reader.

In the allusion that is dominant throughout Handler's series, there is no doubt of the influence of such a katabasis. Dante, as both author and narrator, experiences his personal Hell. As an author, this would be the living world without his muse, Beatrice. By writing *The Divine Comedy*, it may be assumed that Dante was attempting to emotionally descend into his Hell; dealing with the death of Beatrice in such an elaborate manner as writing a narrative with the woman as a major figure would be emotionally exhausting but may have been a way to deal with the loss. This is fitting considering that writing has been shown to reduce self-anxiety after unexpected loss (Range, Kovac, & Marion 129). In expressing his grief through his narrative, therefore, Dante Alighieri not only dives into his personal tribulations but uses it as a means to strengthen himself over his loss.

The journey of Dante as the narrator must be taken into consideration as well. His journey, from an early point in *Inferno*, seems to put the most importance in getting through the levels of Hell and thus being able to see Beatrice. After Virgil explains to Dante that Beatrice asked him to guide the narrator through Inferno, Dante comments with a renewed courage over his wearisome journey:

“O piteous she who hastened to my help,
and courteous thou, that didst at once obey
the words of truth that she addressed to thee!
Thou hast with such desire disposed my heart
toward going on, by reason of thy words,

that to my first intention I've returned.

Go on now, since we two have but one will;

thou Leader, and thou Lord, and Teacher thou!" (Canto II)

That Dante finds strength after hearing of Beatrice's will to help him succeed through the depths of Hell shows the inner desire of both to once again see each other. Had Dante's creation of Beatrice not wanted to see Dante in the same capacity, she would not have pleaded with Virgil to be his guide. It is of note to see, however, that although Dante had his mind on his destination, it was his physical journey that made him stronger as a character. By the time that Dante does reach Beatrice, he has changed from the man he was at the beginning of his journey and also feels ashamed at his earlier faults: "I stood, as children silent and asham'd / Stand, list'ning, with their eyes upon the earth, / Acknowledging their fault and self-condemn'd" (Canto 31). That such a transformation should happen only emphasizes that the journey marks a transition from an older persona into a newer, empowered one.

Taking this allusion into consideration within *A Series of Unfortunate Events* causes the reader to draw the connection with Lemony Snicket taking his own descent into Hell. This connection specifically relates Dante as the author with Snicket as the "author"-narrator of the Baudelaires' tale. In the same manner in which Dante used his writing to deal with the loss of his beloved, Snicket in many ways uses his account of the orphans' trail to deal with the loss of his own Beatrice. His moments of self reflection within the text reveal just how much despair frequents his thoughts of the dead woman. "I toss and turn each night," Snicket writes in *The Ersatz Elevator*, "images of Beatrice and her legacy filling my weary, grieving brain no matter where in the world I travel and no matter what important evidence I discover" (57). In some

ways, Snicket does improve from his grief because of his narration of his investigation. At least, he learns to cope with his loss:

“In many ways, the lives of the Baudelaire orphans that year is not unlike my own, now that I have concluded my investigation. Like Violet, like Klaus, and like Sunny, I visit certain graves, and often spend my mornings standing on a brae, staring out at the same sea. It is not the whole story, of course, but it is enough. Under the circumstances, it is the best for which you can hope.” (*End* 324)

He uses his words to take a trip into his loss and emerges with less guilt because of his work on the Baudelaire case.

Looking at the allusion through a wider perspective, furthermore, reveals the actual protagonists to be on a journey through Hell themselves. Violet, Klaus, and Sunny begin their lives as most children do--with the presence and guidance from their parents. Yet once their parents are taken away, they start their descent into their respective Hell. Their journey is not one typical for any child, even an orphan, and the horrors they witnessed (Count Olaf threatening to murder them, seeing innocent men being murdered, and fellow children being kidnapped, to name a few) are ones that some adults may not be able to handle. At the end of a long physical journey, the Baudelaires find themselves on the island. It is significant that the Baudelaires find themselves here because this island essentially completes the full-circle that characterizes the typical katabasis. They find that their parents once resided on the very island:

“As they walked out of the arboretum, led by their clay-footed facilitator, the Baudelaire orphans wondered about their own unfortunate history, and that of their parents and all the other castaways who had washed up on the shores of the island, adding chapter upon chapter to *A Series of Unfortunate Events*.” (*End* 232-233)

That Violet, Klaus, and Sunny should end their journey at a place that was so vital to their parents' lives, not to mention in the lives of so many other V.F.D. members, brings the memories of their parents back to them. In this way, the orphans come full-circle in their journey; they began with their parents in a relatively safe place and *The End* reestablishes that scenario in the best way that it can. The crucial difference between *The Bad Beginning* and *The End* being that the orphans have grown physically, emotionally, and morally over the course of their journey.

When seeing the Baudelaire orphans as taking their own trip through Hell, it is imperative to also view their journey in relation to the characters that they meet along the way. Many characters can be matched up to the levels of Hell that Dante encounters, though they do not necessarily appear in the order that Dante establishes. Count Olaf is an exemplar of treachery in his pursuit of the Baudelaire fortune. Esme Squalor exhibits anger towards Beatrice's role in the sugar bowl fiasco. Both Madame Lulu and Ishmael are characterized by their lifestyles dedicated to fraud. Due to the exposure of the three children to these types of sins, not only do they gain a moral development that comes from such exposure but they also become more aware of their own sins. That some characters only appear for one volume of the work furthers the connection with *Inferno* since most of the figures that Dante pinpoints only appear within their appropriate level. The characters that the Baudelaires meet along their journey generally work to expose more mature topics to both the Baudelaires and the reader.

Overall, the inclusion of this allusion in which there is a descent into Hell highlights the fact that allusions bring back what was once in the past. In the same way that epic heroes bring back those who have died from Hades, allusions take the events, people, and literature that was once significant and thrusts them back into the living world. It is difficult to bring back what was once lost, however. Orpheus, for instance, attempted to bring his wife Eurydice from the

Underworld after her death, only to lose her again by not strictly following to instruction set forth by Hades. Snicket, no matter how long he chronicles the Baudelaire children's journey and expresses his guilt over their dead mother, cannot bring back Beatrice except through the memories in his narrative. In the same way, allusions have their own condition in that they cannot be fully brought back unless the reader understands the reference being made. It takes the effort of both the author and the reader to bring the allusion back into the living conversation.

This feature of allusions is particularly important to the child reader because they are (or soon will be) experiencing a point in their lives when their experiences will mirror the nature of allusions being a transition from what was old into what is new. Allusions take the wisdom, insight, and knowledge of works from the past and use them to inform the works in the present; children have to take their lessons from childhood, the essential morals and practices instilled within them by adults, and use them to inform their decisions from adolescence onward.

Conclusion

The allusions within *A Series of Unfortunate Events* are ones that prove the series to be an exemplar in the world of children's literature. This is established by the manner in which the allusions mirror the very nature of childhood. First, allusions expand upon the text created by the author but also upon the original work that is being referenced. Childhood itself expands upon the experiences of the young child but also adds in the experiences of each new day. Second, allusions show a journey that has to be taken. Childhood is itself a journey from innocence to eventual maturity. And finally, allusions mark a transition from what is old into what is new. Again, this is clearly seen in the process of childhood as the child grows. Furthermore, the introduction of children to intertextuality that takes place with the inclusion of allusions assist

with the construction of meaning of the child audience. This mirroring, coupled with the cultural awareness and intertextuality that come with allusions, works in the favor of Handler's series to make it readable and enjoyable for an audience comprised of both children and adults.

In addition to including multiple allusions within his work, Handler goes one step further than most other authors: he not only builds upon an existing archive of literature but he builds his own archive as well. By incorporating the allusions within *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, he has added in the influence of many great writers and events before him. That he decided to make his series into a thirteen-volume tale, however, means that he himself has much room to expand and elaborate on his own fictional world. What is particularly genius about Handler's writings, however, is that he expands his story into his supplemental texts.

For instance, Handler expands the world of Lemony Snicket into books that are essentially spin-offs from the main series. *The Beatrice Letters*, a book released shortly before the final thirteenth volume, featured a series of letters written by Lemony Snicket to Beatrice Baudelaire (the deceased mother) and others written from Beatrice Baudelaire (the younger child) to Lemony Snicket. In many ways, this added to the general knowledge that the reader had available about the character. Not only was a more in-depth look taken at the actual relationship between Snicket and Baudelaire but a glimpse into the future beyond even the conclusion was presented to the reader.

While *The Beatrice Letters* tackles the future of the children and their adopted child, *The Unauthorized Autobiography* gives a look into the past of Lemony Snicket and also of the secret organization V.F.D.. In this book, Handler expands upon his narrative in a means that is different than his main series. *The Unauthorized Autobiography*, instead of using a strictly-written narrative, utilizes a format that is similar to that of a scrapbook. Quotes, transcriptions, and

newspapers advertisements are but a few items that are used in this book to give more clarity to the mysterious figure that is Lemony Snicket. To a reader, this gives a refreshing look on the story as it approaches the plot from a different angle both in terms of content and of format. Additionally, it teaches children that there is always more to a story than its initial telling; there is always more to be said, more to be considered, and more interpretations to be had.

Handler does not stop at books to expand upon his narrative, either. In *The Tragic Treasury*, he becomes the leader of the band *The Gothic Archies* in order to provide a soundtrack of sorts to the tale of the Baudelaires. (*The Gothic Archies*, suitably, being an allusion to both the gothic arches and *The Archies*.) The individual songs, mixed with humor and clever lyrics, also allow for archontic expansion as allusions to other musical works are made. In the video for “Scream and Run Away”, for instance, the Snicket figure makes an allusion to a music video made by Bob Dylan in which the musician holds up signs to the song’s lyrics. Again, Handler is taking the allusions to another work and incorporating them in a way that adds on to his own masterpiece’s archive.

It should be noted that by taking such great lengths to keep his world alive, Handler keeps the control of his archive within his own hands for an extended period. Many fans, once enamored with a particular book or book series, will strive to find ways to keep that story going once it has stopped. This generally means that such readers participate in online forums, create fan-art, or even fanfiction about their beloved stories. Daniel Handler, by continuing to add on to his narrative archive, both helps and hinders any such works by fans of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. By continually adding more details, more events, more characters to his story, Handler gives his fans more to take in about his world. He essentially satisfies the want for a good story to never end. Yet this also means that he takes more control over where the story actually goes.

Once an author publishes an additional book, the ways in which the readers can imagine the plot to continue in their own minds is severely limited and what he publishes must be accepted as the canon for that story. Handler creates this grand archive for his fans to consume but he alone remains the primary maker in his universe. This only works to create an equal power dynamic between Handler and his readers, however, as his controlled archive actually gives the readers more story on which they can base their various fan creations.

That Daniel Handler has written such a massive and diverse collection of works *for A Series of Unfortunate Events* is important to consider when keeping the allusions in the forefront of the reader's mind. The allusions add on to his work in a way that his new books cannot: they add a depth to the novels that can only come from the influence of existing works while Handler simultaneously pulls influence into his newer novels. Separate, the allusions and the spin-off novels could have shown that the author is clever; together, they show that Handler has a much bigger idea of what his reader should be taking from his writing—that the very nature of literature is to be expansive.

Furthermore, Handler's archontic expansion also sets up a scenario which is ripe for allusions across his own works. Within each volume of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, Handler allows Snicket to reference events, people, and places that are to appear in other books within the series. In *The Bad Beginning*, for instance, the island that is to be the main location for *The End* is alluded to in the midst of a discussion about law.

"But the law is an odd thing. For instance, one country in Europe has a law that requires all its bakers to sell bread at the same price. A certain island has a law that forbids anyone from removing its fruit. And a town not too far from where you live has a law that bars me from coming within five miles of its borders." (153)

This allusion to the island where Ishmael resides would be missed unless the reader was already well-versed with the Baudelaire story. Certainly, the laws that frame the reference are not given any more attention. The reader does not hear again about “one country in Europe” or the town that is “not too far” from the reader’s location--but the island does make a more important appearance later on. In many ways, this mirrors the way in which all allusions gain their significance: it takes someone that is familiar with the dominant culture to realize the allusion and give it meaning. In any case, Handler’s use of such allusions works to contribute to his archive.

The establishment of his archive does wonders for the child reader. First and foremost, this sets up the idea that a good book does not end at the conclusion of the last page. Whether it be the insightful imaginations of child readers that causes them to ask themselves what they believe will happen next or the active seeking of the next book in a series, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* shows that the story has the possibility to continue on. Second, this can be used to introduce the idea that books of a similar genre may be of interest to a child reader. Children that understand that *The Beatrice Letters* or *The Unauthorized Autobiography* are related to *A Series of Unfortunate Events* even though they are drastically different could understand that a book within the same genre as one they love may also be one that they can enjoy. Third, as mentioned earlier, children can learn to harness their imaginative minds to add their own expansions to the archive via fanart, fanfiction, or mere fan discussion. And finally, it teaches the child reader that literature must be read in all of its surrounding contexts, whether that be history, society, or simply other texts.

Because of the prolific use of allusions and the subsequent establishment of his narrative archive, Daniel Handler has created a work that is an exemplar of cleverness and sophistication

in the world of children's literature. It balances the repetition and simplistic sentence structure that is crucial to growing minds with the larger cultural stories that individuals should know. It mixes the simple morals of childhood with the harsh lessons to be learned by adults. But most importantly, it takes what appears to be a story meant for children and modifies it to be a tale that can be enjoyed by eager readers of any age.

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